



UNITED STATES SENATE  
**REPUBLICAN  
POLICY COMMITTEE**

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November 19, 2002

*Welfare Reform Claims Another Success*

## **Republican Reforms Helped Left-Leaning Editorial Boards “Grow In Office”**

When conservative politicians break with conservative principles, left-leaning editorial boards laud them for “growing in office.” The welfare reform law passed by a Republican Congress in 1996 now gives conservatives an opportunity to return the compliment.

Exhibit “A” comes from yesterday’s *Washington Post* [editorial](#) on the need to reauthorize the “largely successful” welfare reform law. Recall the vitriol with which the *Post* first condemned the law that Republicans forced President Clinton to sign back in 1996:

“A president enjoying a 20 percentage point lead in the polls was unwilling to put his own political standing at even marginal risk to protect a truly vulnerable segment of society, the minor children of welfare recipients whose well-being is endangered by this bill. Legal immigrants would likewise be victimized. The president deplores the fact; he deplores a lot about this bill, but he’ll sign it nonetheless, professing himself all the while to be the protector of the very classes that he abandons. . .

“Finally, the president tried to make the distinction that it was only the non-welfare parts of the bill that were objectionable – the ripping apart of the food stamp program, the cuts in aid to legal immigrants. But that’s not so. The welfare provisions are objectionable as well. Mr. Clinton acquiesces in legislation in which the federal government washes its hands of responsibility for welfare mothers and children, hands the problem to the states and fails to equip them with the resources to solve it. They protect the federal taxpayer at the state and local taxpayer’s expense, and never mind that those are the same people. Politics is about illusion. There were ways to structure welfare reform that would not have stranded children. The president himself proposed such a plan in the last Congress. In order to put his name on something called welfare reform in an election year, he now accepts a very different kind of proposal. He says they’ll fix the admitted defects later, after the election. What a comfort that must be to the people whom the bill will affect” [“The Welfare Decision,” *Washington Post* editorial, 8/1/96].

Endangering children. Victimizing immigrants. Abandoning entire classes. Ripping apart food stamps. Washing our hands of responsibility for the needy. No question where the *Post* stood on this one.

Fast forward to 2002, where the same editorial page – without a trace of irony – began yesterday’s [editorial](#) on welfare reform by claiming Congress has been the one “mudslinging” over the issue. The editorial then examined the successes of this once “objectionable” law with the detachment of objective social scientists:

“On the achievement side, the list is long. Five years down the line, millions of families have left welfare for work, welfare caseloads are at historical lows, child poverty has declined by some measures and the number of children born out of wedlock has stopped rising. One example of unexpected success: In the District caseloads have dropped by a third. Of the 16,000 who remain on the welfare rolls in the District – which is known for a high proportion of difficult cases – 11,000 [69 percent] are engaged in some kind of work or training. Contrary to expectations, the economic slowdown of the past year has not substantially reversed these gains, in the District or elsewhere. Nor have any studies shown that the children of working single mothers have suffered in any measurable way. Cause-and-effect is notoriously difficult to measure, but the reform legislation surely has played a major role in these gains.”

Exactly whose expectations were confounded, and whose were fulfilled, the editorial does not explore. The editors continue:

“What we are looking at, in other words, is probably best described as an experiment, largely successful thus far but unfinished. We also are looking at a debate that has changed radically. Among those who study poverty and administer programs, there is now general agreement on the importance of work and marriage, as well as a consensus that the states are in the best position to determine how to promote them.”

You’ve come a long way, baby.

However, like many on the Left who now reluctantly acknowledge the success of welfare reform, *The Post* still fails to grasp the law’s wisdom: requiring personal responsibility is the surest way to lift people out of poverty. As such, the editors resist the President’s plan to build on that success. But observers should remember the President’s plan was fashioned by those who grasped this wisdom in the first place: a former governor who implemented welfare reform in Texas, and members of the House of Representatives who supported and passed the 1996 law. When Congress reconvenes, it should put its trust in those with a demonstrated track record of helping the poor.

And then wait for the favorable editorials to roll in.